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This study guide is researched
and designed by the Education
Department at the Milwaukee
Repertory Theater and is
intended to prepare you for
your visit. It contains
information that will deepen
your understanding of, and
appreciation for, the
production. We've also
included questions and
activities for you to explore
before and after our
performance of

**THE GOVERNMENT
INSPECTOR**

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater Presents

THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

Written by Nikolai Gogol
Adapted by Jeffrey Hatcher

September 8 to October 4, 2009

Quadracci Powerhouse Theater



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SYNOPSIS

The role of the government inspector is to supervise government programs and operations in various cities. Not only does he/she investigate local politics and try to prevent fraud and corruption, but also is a resource to provide better policies and methods of carrying out different government programs.

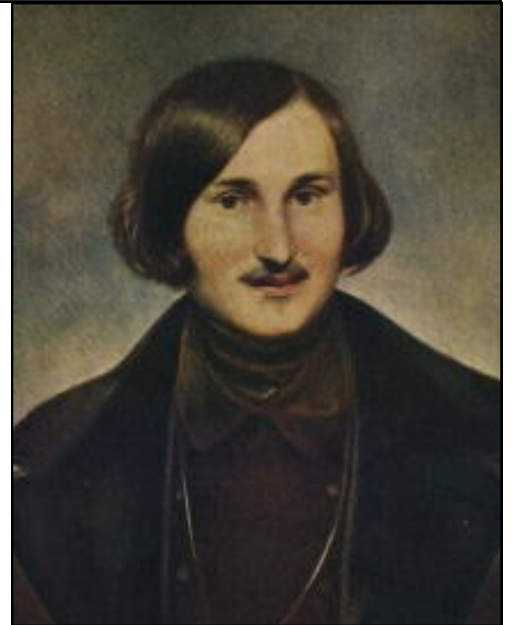
- The Russian Government

When the people of a small town in Russia learn that an undercover government inspector will be visiting their town, chaos ensues. Mayor Anton Antonovich and other government officials know that the small town is corrupt and fear that the inspector will find out. In an attempt to cover up their crooked deeds, the mayor is given information that the inspector is staying at a small inn and decides to take matter into his own hands. He visits the government inspector hoping to cover up the city's problems and bribe his way out of his dishonest actions. Little does Mayor Antonovich know that the man he visits, Alexandreyevich Hlestekov, is only a civil servant and that his actions are equally dishonest. Things heat up and get out of hand as Hlestekov plays up his new found role as government inspector and the mayor and other officials continue to bribe him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

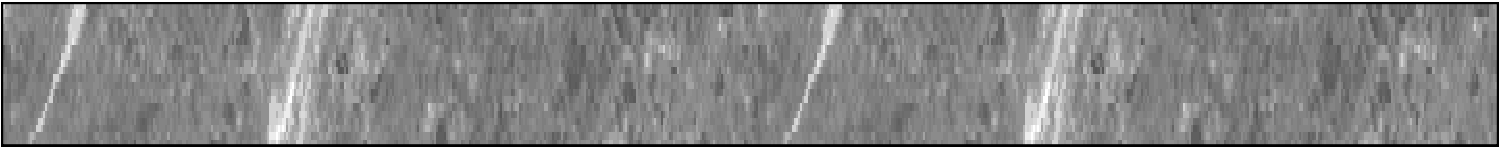
Nikolai Gogol was a great Russian novelist, dramatist, satirist and founder of critical realism in Russian literature. Gogol's writing is characterized by imaginative power and linguistic playfulness. He was born in Sorochintsi, Ukraine and grew up on his parents' country estate. His real last name was Ianovskii, but the writer's grandfather had taken the name 'Gogol' to claim a noble ancestry. Gogol's father was an educated and gifted man who wrote plays, poems and sketches.

Gogol started writing while in high school. He attended Poltava Boarding School from 1819 to 1821 and then went to the high school in Nezhin from 1821 to 1828. After his time in Nezhin, Gogol settled in St. Petersburg, Russia. In order to support himself Gogol worked as a civil clerk and occasionally wrote for periodicals. However, the capital of Russia did not welcome him with open arms because of his early narrative poem, *Hans Küchelgarten* (1829), which turned out to be a disaster. Gogol bought all the copies of the periodicals the poem was in and burned them, promising himself to never write poetry again. In 1831 he met Alexander Pushkin who greatly influenced his writing, especially his *Dikanka Tales*, a short story based on Ukrainian folklore. Their friendship lasted until Pushkin's death. Gogol even published several stories in Pushkin's journal *Sovremennik*.



It was *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (1832) that was considered Gogol's breakthrough work and in 1835, Gogol became a full-time writer. He published new stories in his work *Mirgorod* (1835) beginning with 'Old-World Landowners', which described the decay of the old way of life. The book also included the famous historical tale 'Taras Bulba'. In his short stories, Gogol played with the idea that St. Petersburg was both a utopian city of the future, but also a failing religious community full of people trying to further the idea of the Anti-Christ.

THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR was published in 1836. Its first stage production was in St. Petersburg, given



in the presence of the tsar. After the show, the tsar said, "What a play! Gets at everyone and most of all at me!" While some people say that after hearing this, Gogol, who was always sensitive about other people's reaction to his work, fled Russia for Western Europe, others say that he was exiled because of the insults contained in the play. During his time away, Gogol visited Germany, Switzerland and France and eventually settled in Rome. With the exception of a few visits to Russia, Gogol was abroad for 12 years.

In Rome, Gogol wrote his major work, *The Dead Souls*. Gogol claimed that the story was suggested by Pushkin in a conversation in 1835. Wanting to embody not only the good, but also the bad parts of Russian society, the story deals with lies, greed and death. During the last years of his life, Gogol struggled to continue the story, writing various sequels that never seemed right to him. When Gogol's collected works were published in 1842, he became one of the most popular Russian writers. However, when Gogol published *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* in 1847, the book brought disappointment among radicals who saw Gogol's works as examples of social criticism where the aristocracy and their opportunist ideas were denounced.

In his later life, Gogol became good friends with a church elder, Father Konstantinovskii. The priest brainwashed Gogol into believing that many of his works were sinful. In a mad fit, Gogol burned many of his manuscripts and became severely depressed. After this, Gogol refused to eat or drink, despite the efforts of many of his friends and eventually died in 1852. He was buried at the Danilov Monastery, but in 1931 the monastery was demolished and his remains were moved to the Novodevichy Cemetery. When his body was dug up, he was discovered lying face down, which gave rise to suspicions that Gogol had been buried alive.

GOGOL AND HIS WORK

Gogol is considered to be a forefront of what was to come in Russian literature. For almost 100 years before him, modern Russian literature was dominated by poetry. Around 1830, a new trend began to emerge in Russian literature. Motivated by literary developments in other countries, poetry gave way to prose and became the medium of choice by many Russian writers, including Fyodor Dostoevsky and Alexander Pushkin.

However, it was Gogol that did the most to establish prose as a literary force in Russia. His use of satire, humor, social realism, the fantastic and grotesque distinguish Gogol from other Russian writers. He chose to challenge ideas of society, including Russian bureaucracy and political censorship. Before Gogol wrote, he was a civil servant and experienced Russian bureaucracy at its best and worst and knew of the corruption in the government officials. Gogol's desire for the moral reformation of Russia became increasingly loud as his writings progressed. He felt it important to not only show the good, but also the bad, tainted side of Russian society.

"Gogol exerted an immense influence on the whole course of Russian literature and continues to do so to the present day. There is scarcely a later Russian writer who did not succumb in some measure to his magic, and in many cases his influence was crucial. In this sense alone, to call Gogol the 'father of Russian prose fiction' is eminently justifiable."

- Richard Peace

While the situations Gogol wrote about were not unlike ones Russians faced, they were pushed to the limits to create an atypical incident. He took ordinary people and put them in extraordinary circumstances. While many people saw this as a positive thing, others regarded it negatively. They saw themselves in his writings and were concerned with how it would affect society. In the end, Gogol's writings became ever popular and influential to other writers then and now.

A BRIEF MOMENT WITH MARTHA HALLY, COSTUME DESIGNER



Rendering of Anna Ardreyevna

Rebecca Witt: How did you get into costume design?

Martha Hally: When I was in college I was interested in being an actor because, I think, when you're growing up that's really the only part of the theater world you really know. I had an acting teacher who thought maybe I should find something else to do. Then, there was another teacher who said "Why don't you do wardrobe for a play?" That was the first time I'd ever been backstage. And I loved it. I loved the view from backstage-- looking out onto the stage, watching the audiences' reaction and working with the actors.

RW: What process do you go through when you design costumes for shows?

MH: Well, I read the play first. And I read it many, many times and make notes about things and places that will help the audience understand the characters or understand the world that we're presenting to them. Then I talk to the director and see what the director is thinking about the play. After that we get together with the other designers and we discuss the world of the play (in this case it's a small town in Russia) and what we want to say about these people and where they live.

RW: How would you describe the costumes for this show?

MH: There's a lot of theatrical exaggeration to them. They are not realistic. Each character is very delineated by how he thinks of himself. The judge thinks he's very self-important, so he's kind of puffed out and he has a lot of gold and takes up a lot of space on stage. The school principal is tall and thin and he's very nervous, so we're accentuating his thinness. We have exaggerated their silhouettes. That's how we're using costumes to suggest who these people are.

RW: What do the costumes say to the audience?

MH: That this is not real life. But, they might be able to identify some character flaws in the characters that are in people they might know. We've created a world that's not realistic, but they might see something about themselves in it or people they've read about in the newspapers.

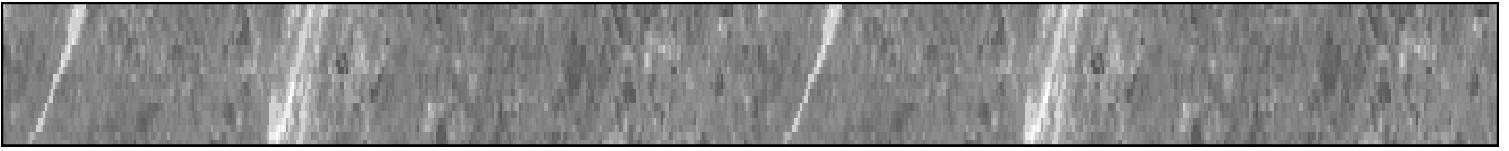


Rendering of the Judge



Rendering of the School Principal

*Costume Renderings drawn
by Martha Hally*



RW: What sort of interaction do you have with the other members of the design team? How closely do you work with them?

MH: When we start out, we're all very much together. We discuss the play together and talk about color schemes. And then we each go our own separate way. During the tech rehearsal period, we're all in the theater together, talking about if this is working, how the light looks on the costumes and how the costumes look on the set.

RW: How does this show compare to other shows that you've designed?

MH: Each show is different. Each one has its own challenges. This one's a little easier because nobody changes costumes. If you're doing a big Shakespearean production, people change clothes a lot, you have armies to dress. So this was fairly simple because it is a smaller cast with no changes during the course of the play.

ABOUT THE REP COSTUME SHOP

The Costume shop is a busy place during the season. With 14 shows in nine months, there isn't a lot of free time. This information will give you an idea of how the Costume shop works and who is involved.

- It employs as many as 16-22 full-time artisans during the season.
- They often buy contemporary costumes, but usually build period costumes.
- The Costume shop begins work on costumes about 6 weeks before a show opens.
- There are many people involved in the creating of costumes:
 - Costume Designer – Designs the costumes for the show.
 - Draper – Creates 3-D muslin mock-ups by draping fabric on a mannequin and creates a brown paper pattern from the mock-up.
 - First Hand – Cuts the pattern out of muslin and fashion fabric.
 - Stitcher – Responsible for assembling the garment.
 - Crafts Artisan – Fits shoes, hats and other accessories at costume fittings.
 - Wig Master – Fits wig to actor and styles it for the show. Synthetic and human hair wigs are used.
- From technical/dress rehearsal on, wardrobe crew takes over costumes and show maintenance

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

For THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR, the designers have decided to keep the play set in the past. Do you think that this is a good idea? Is it ever good idea to put the play in the present? Would that change the message the designers want to get across? Why or why not?

Before you see the show, design your own costumes for some of the characters in the play. What will they be wearing? What colors? Share your renderings with your classmates. Make sure you are able to justify your artistic choices to others.

After viewing the play, do you think that the costumes worked? Do you think that the costumes helped to demonstrate the characteristics of the people in the show? Why or why not? What did the costumes say to you?

VOCABULARY



Ruble/Kopeck – Russian currency, 100 kopecks make one ruble; one ruble equals approximately \$0.03

Repast – a meal

MAYOR: Tell Vlass to open up the kitchen. He's to prepare a special *repast* for this gentleman at once. **Salmon, cutlets, potatoes, cheese, figs, cream, pears, and your best wine.**

Agnostic – the belief that the afterlife is unknown

Atheist – the belief in no higher power

JUDGE: The fact that I am an *Agnostic* has no bearing on my ability to entertain all sides of every argument.

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: I thought you were a *Atheist*.

Skint – slang for poor

HLESTAKOV: Osip, I'm at the end of my time... I'm *skint*, Osip...I've pawned my cuff links, my stickpins, my cane, and I still can't scrape up enough to buy a meal or pay for this ghastly little room.

Reckrimination - blame

MARYA: Oh, you're all horrible!

ANNA: The pitter-patter of *reckrimination*.

Troika – a fancy carriage drawn by horses

MAYOR: He won't ride in that awful public coach at all. You'll take our *troika*! Bring it back with you day after tomorrow.



Assuage – to subdue

MAYOR: He's obviously a man with a quick trigger. I must *assuage* him somehow.

Felicitations – congratulations

PANTELEYEVA: Ah, mayor, sir, *felicitations* on your good fortune!

Here are some other vocabulary words you may want to look up:

Aspersions

Fortuitous

Euphemism

Inamorato

Aspersions

Diminutive

Egregious

Dispensation

Idgekin

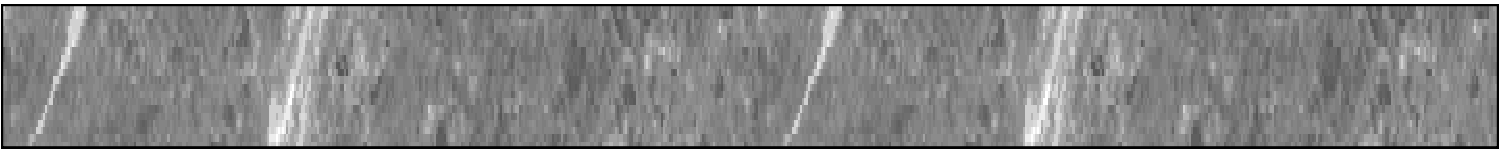
Purview

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Under Tsar Alexander I, who reigned from 1801 to 1825, and Tsar Nicholas I, who reigned from 1825 to 1855, the number of theaters in Russia increased. Russian Realism became the leading aesthetic principle and most plays were written in the Russian language. By the time Alexander ascended the throne in 1800, various formal theater venues existed, including Hermitage Court Theater in the Winter Palace, other Imperial theaters in Moscow and St. Petersburg and smaller non-court theaters organized by state government. In 1804, a censorship law was passed by Alexander, limiting the plays that could and could not be performed. While it regulated offensive material, the law was merely an exercise to have more control over the state.



Inside the Hermitage Theater



In 1826, Nicholas pushed the censorship law to the extreme and prohibited the publication of any writing that criticized and mocked the monarchy, the church or the existing order of society. While some writers received warnings and reprimands, others received fines and police supervision. In 1847, censorship expanded to have control over all the capital and local non-court theaters. Because of the restrictions on the bigger, leading professional theaters, the smaller theaters, including street shows, cabarets and amateur theaters in drawing rooms and salons, were less closely watched by the secret police. These smaller theaters were an important source of inspiration for the avant-garde theater to come in the early twentieth century.

Despite government censorship, some of the greatest Russian plays were written in the second quarter of the 19th century. WOE FROM WIT by Alexander Griboedev was written in 1824 but because of trouble with censors it was not performed until 1931, two years after his death. Also in 1824, Alexander Pushkin, the highly respected national writer, wrote BORIS GUDUNOV. The play was published six years later. And in 1836, Nikolai Gogol wrote THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR and it was performed only after Tsar Nicholas I personally approved it impulsively beforehand based on pure fondness of Gogol.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

There are many pieces of literature that have been censored or removed because of what's in them. Some examples are the novels CATCHER IN THE RYE and LORD OF THE FLIES as well as the play THE CHILDREN'S HOUR. What other literature has been censored or removed? Have any pieces of literature been censored or removed from your school? Why? Do you think it was for the better?

Censorship has been around for a long time. Where do you see censorship? Do you think it is okay to censor some things and not others? Why? How does censorship affect you?

Do some more research on Russian Realism and Realism in general. What are the characteristics of this type of literature? Why do you think it became so popular during Gogol's time? Do we still see realism in literature and theater today? If so, where?

After seeing THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR, do you think that the people of Gogol's time had something to be upset about? Do you think that the tsar was right in allowing the piece to be performed? Why or why not?

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

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VISITING THE REP

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater is housed in the Milwaukee Center at the corner of Wells and Water Streets, downtown. Our building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company. This name is still carved on the wall outside.

You'll enter on the Wells Street side into a large, open space. Our box office will be visible on your left as you come through the front doors. The large space is the main hub for the businesses that share this building: a bank, an office tower, the Pabst Theater and the Intercontinental Hotel. If you walk into the center of this area, you'll see a staircase on your left. You will take this staircase to the Powerhouse Theater lobby.

Inside the lobby are restrooms, water fountains and a coat check. If you decide to bring a snack, please know that food and drink are NOT permitted in the theater. However, you can leave things (at your own risk) in the coat check room and enjoy them outside the theater during intermission. Most plays have one intermission that is about 20 minutes long. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the full "running time" of the play.

**For more information on our education programs and our productions,
please visit our website at www.milwaukeeerep.com**

***"You need three things in the theatre – the play,
the actors and the audience, and each must give
something." – Kenneth Haigh***

The Rep Milwaukee
THEATER ♦ TRAINING AT ITS BEST

Programs in the Education Department receive
generous funding from:

The Helen Bader Foundation

Johnson Control

The Einhorn Family Foundation

The Harley Davidson Foundation

The Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation

MPS Partnership for the Arts

Milwaukee Arts Board

GE Healthcare

Theater is described as a collaborative art form. The success of a production relies upon every member of the process: playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, actors and the audience. Plays require audiences to give a new life to performances through their careful attention and enthusiastic reactions. The audience has an active role to play and the actors rely on you to be respectful and attentive. Through your observation of sets, costumes, lighting and the work of the actors, you'll be better able to follow the story and enjoy the live presentation. You are important in the final performance and your participation is what makes this process worthwhile.

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